

## K-State's NCAA tournament seeding at stake Saturday

By TATE STEINLAGE  
THE COLLEGIAN

Losing three out their last four games, the K-State men's basketball team is close to being on the outside looking in of the Big 12 conference title race.

But when the No. 15 Texas Longhorns roll into Bramlage Coliseum Saturday for a marquee matchup, the Wildcats will have much more than a regular season championship to play for.

As of Jan. 30, ESPN college basketball analyst Joe Lunardi has K-State slotted as an eighth seed in the South Region of March's NCAA Tournament. The likelihood of that position being correct will depend particularly on how well the Wildcats play in their next five games.

That stretch will include matchups against the Longhorns and Kansas Jayhawks in Manhattan, and road contests against the Baylor Bears and Oklahoma Sooners. It'll also feature two storylines: can K-State maintain their spotless home court record in Big 12 play, and can the Wildcats finally have success on the road?

But how important is all of this for the postseason? Well, the difference between an eighth and

seventh seed can be staggering. The difference between an eighth and, say, 12th or 13th? Brutal.

If the tournament started today, K-State would be matched up against a dangerous Florida State squad (RPI: 38) that has played the ACC close all season.

A major slip up between now and March could make it even worse. Staying in the South Region, seeds 11-14 may mean facing the likes of Creighton, Louisville, St. Louis, or even Florida.

However, all of this will also depend on how K-State shows at the Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship in Kansas City, Mo., March 12-15.

As of today, K-State would enter the tournament a fifth seed. That spot begins play in the quarterfinals against the fourth seed, which would currently be the Iowa State Cyclones.

The Wildcats are in position to make a run in the next month and earn as high as a second seed, though they also have the possibility of falling all the way to the seventh seed. This would require them to play their way into the quarterfinals.

Wherever they fall, their performance in Kansas City will weigh heavily on their NCAA Tournament seeding. According



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West Virginia forward **Devin Williams** attempts to work around junior forward **Thomas Gipson** during the first half of the Wildcats' 78-56 beatdown of the Mountaineers Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum.

to Team Rankings, K-State has a 32 percent chance of advancing to the semifinals and a 10 percent chance of reaching the finals. An early exit could prove costly, while even just one win can mean

the difference between one seed and another. How's that for March Madness?

While the importance of defending a Big 12 title goes without saying, this K-State squad has

bigger fish to fry far after the end of the regular season. That should be the main focus of this young group as they face their toughest challenges and loudest critics in the next month.

## Wildcats matchup well against Longhorns; Saturday could be 'instant classic'

By AUSTIN EARL  
THE COLLEGIAN

On Jan. 21, the K-State Wildcats played the Texas Longhorns in the two teams' first meeting of the season. The game ended in a heart-breaking buzzer beating by Texas junior forward Jonathan Holmes that won the game for the Longhorns.

The sequel will be played on Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum. The teams matchup well together and could provide another instant classic in a 2014 Big 12 season that has already been full of great games.

### Back court: Texas

Holmes is the Longhorns' leading scorer. He scores 13.7

points per game, and grabs 7.7 rebounds per game. While he had the big shot against K-State to win the game, he did not have an overall great game offensively. He scored just eight points. His biggest contribution was his 10 rebounds. The Wildcats must find someone to get a body on him and box him out to limit his rebounding on Saturday.

Holmes' made the final shot, but the first game's MVP was sophomore guard Javan Felix. Felix led the Longhorns with 23 points, carrying the team through multiple dry spells. He will be guarded on Saturday by freshman Marcus Foster. The Foster/Felix matchup will be crucial to the game. Felix won round one, outscoring Foster by 15

points. If K-State wants to win on Saturday, they must contain Felix. Foster must also produce more than just eight points.

Texas freshman point guard Isaiah Taylor should also be a factor in Saturday's contest. Taylor had just four points against K-State in January, but has averaged 12.1 points per game throughout the season. He has scored 61 points in his past three games, tearing up KU and Baylor.

### Front court: K-State

K-State's big man, junior forward Thomas Gipson, was the reason the Wildcats stayed in the game against Texas in January. He scored 24 points and had 5 rebounds. While he was great offensively, his de-

fense needed some work. His matchup, sophomore center Cameron Ridley scored 18 points. Ridley also had three blocks. The Longhorns might have more depth in the front court, but Gipson can clearly cause problems for Texas.

The Wildcats need the same type of production from Gipson in game two. The front court for K-State matches up just about equally with Texas. If Gipson puts up big numbers and plays better defense, that gives the Wildcats an advantage in the game.

Player to Watch: Javan Felix

Felix had a huge game against K-State earlier this season. Felix hasn't been the best scorer so far for the Longhorns, so when he goes

above his average, he's an X-Factor. Another 23-point outburst could doom the Wildcats in Bramlage. If Foster can contain him, Felix's team may be in trouble.

### Best Matchup: Ridley vs. Gipson

This matchup could de-

cide the game. Ridley and Gipson had nearly identical games in Austin, Texas. If these two players cancel each other out again, then the game will most likely end up coming down to the last possession. But if one player gains a clear advantage in the matchup, his team will be on the fast lane to victory.



# TIPOFF

12:30 p.m. Bramlage Coliseum



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Sophomore forward **D.J. Johnson** and senior forward **Shane Southwell** attempt to block a shot from Iowa State senior guard **DeAndre Kane** during the second half of K-State's 81-75 loss to the Cyclones Jan. 25 in Hilton Coliseum at Ames, Iowa. Johnson came away with the defensive rebound.

## K-State to host No. 15 Texas after midweek break

By JOHN ZETMEIR  
THE COLLEGIAN

The midweek bye could not have come at a better time for the K-State Wildcats who will square off with the No. 15 Texas Longhorns Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum. K-State (15-7, 5-4 Big 12) enters the game as losers of three of their last four games.

"A lot of guys have been resting," freshman guard Marcus Foster said. "We were easy on our legs Monday and Tuesday. It was definitely a relief, our bodies are all beaten up."

The Wildcats, who got off to a quick start in Big 12 competition, are in need of a big win to get them back on track. After a 4-1 start in conference play, which had the Wildcats sitting in second place, K-State have dropped four of their last five road games. Saturday's matchup with the Longhorns not only offers a chance for the Wildcats to get back on track, but the chance to grab a win over the team in second place in the Big 12.

"No matter what, you want to protect home court and that's what we've talked about," head coach Bruce Weber said. "We want to have success here, there is no doubt."

In front of a purple crowd this season, the Wildcats have played at a new level. K-State is currently undefeated at 3-0

against ranked teams in front of a K-State crowd. Weber's squad is also undefeated in conference play when playing at Bramlage Coliseum.

There has not been a shortage of scoring on the road for the Wildcats. It has all boiled down to the defensive end for K-State on the road. At home, the Wildcats are holding Big 12 opponents to just over 62 points per game. Away from Manhattan, K-State has surrendered an average of just over 72 points per game. The 10 point difference may not seem like an astronomical difference, but three of the Wildcats four road losses have come by 10 points or less.

"We use our crowd and our energy to help us on defense and our offense so we usually play pretty good in front of them," junior forward Thomas Gipson said.

There was no shortage of excitement the last time these two teams squared off. In the first matchup, it was the Longhorns upsetting the Wildcats in Austin, Texas when junior forward Jonathan Holmes drilled a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the Longhorns the win. Holmes was able to sneak past Gipson the final to get the shot that he wanted, Gipson has not forgotten that and has put a lot of the responsibility on his shoulders for the loss.

"To be honest, I fell asleep and it was pretty much my fault," Gipson said. "Coach asked me what happened and

I just had to tell him 'I fell asleep' and I took the blame for that loss."

The Longhorns enter the game as one of the hottest, if not the hottest team, in the Big 12. After starting off their Big 12 schedule with two straight losses, Texas has not faltered. They are a perfect 7-0 since Jan. 8, and are coming off of a big win over a top 10 team in Kansas.

The X-Factor for the Longhorns has been sophomore forward Cameron Ridley. The 6-foot-9-inch, 285 pound big man has been a brute in the paint for Texas. In the first matchup, Ridley had a career Big 12 high 18 points.

"They are a totally different team," senior forward Shane Southwell said. "Against us, it was the start of them really getting confident. They were doing well before us, but it seemed like after that game, they really became confident."

The Wildcats will face another top 15 team on Monday when they take on No. 8 Kansas. However, K-State cannot get caught looking ahead to their in-state foe. According to Weber, the Wildcats have spent a lot of this week simply getting his squad back to playing their brand of basketball.

"We prepared for ourselves," Weber said. "We did a little bit of Texas today but our days of practice were about us and getting better."

Tipoff is set for 12:30.

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## By the Numbers

By BRANDON PAINTER  
THE COLLEGIAN

### 1.9

The number of seconds left in the game when Texas inbouded the ball and Jonathan Holmes put up the game-winning shot.

The game looked to be heading into overtime when Shane Southwell made a fundamental layup with five seconds left. The Longhorns pushed it up to half court and called a timeout. After a scrappy couple of seconds, Holmes wet the hoop from the corner, putting another tally in their win column.

### 2-1

K-State's record against Texas basketball

teams this season.

After all, K-State fans do claim to "own Texas." This is an important figure to keep track of. Let's see if the Wildcats can improve this to 3-1 as they take on the Longhorns here in Manhattan on Saturday at 12:30 p.m.

### 7

Wins in a row for the rolling Longhorns.

Texas has nestled into a cozy 2nd place in the Big 12. With a better road record than the potent Kansas Jayhawks at 5-1, the Longhorns are looking to hold firm in Bramlage and keep their win streak alive.

### 13.9

Points per game average for star

freshman Marcus Foster.

Marcus Foster has established himself as a clear leader on this young squad -- in the loss to Texas on Jan. 21, Foster only put up eight points. Thomas Gipson led the way with 24 points. He'll have to replicate that effort in order for the Wildcats to edge out the Longhorns, and several other key players will need to have big days.

### 15

Texas' current ranking in the AP Poll. Last time these two competed, K-State was ranked No. 22 in the country and Texas was unranked. Things have changed quite a bit in a few short weeks.



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Freshman forward **Marcus Foster** shouts at teammates during the waning minutes of the second half of the Wildcats' 72-66 victory over the No. 25 Oklahoma Sooners Jan. 14 in Bramlage Coliseum. Foster led the Wildcats with 18 points, even after injuring his finger early in the game.

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## POWERCAT PROFILE

WILL SPRADLING

By SPENCER LOW  
THE COLLEGIAN

Sometimes it seems like a player has been around forever. Today's iteration of college basketball rarely sees players spend four years as a contributor on a college team. But when a player manages to play -- and play well -- for four years, he or she is an aberration.

Will Spradling is an aberration. "He's played a lot of games, a lot of minutes. I think sometimes people take him for granted, he just does so much," head coach Bruce Weber said. "You can play him at the point, you can play him at the two. He plays great, he has great awareness on defense. He just knows what you're doing ahead of time."

In the 2010-11 season, Spradling's freshman campaign, he was one of four players to see action in every game. The next year, he was one of two players to start every game. During his junior season, his stretch of 96 consecutive games and 62 straight starts was brought to an end, but he still managed 33 starts in 34 appearances. This season, he has started all 22 games so far. Barring injury, he will continue to start for the rest of the season.

The Overland Park na-

tive signed with the Wildcats as a junior in high school at Shawnee Mission South, and began to make an impact right away. He averaged 6.4 points points per game playing largely from the bench as a freshman. He quickly became known for his penchant for drawing charges as he led the team with 21.

As a sophomore, he transitioned into a starting role and saw his numbers rise. He put up 9.3 points per game, along with 2.8 assists. He once again led the team in charges drawn with 26. He also shot a team-high 82 percent from the free throw line, which has long been a point of trouble for the Wildcats.

Last season, he averaged 7.4 points per game. His free throw percentage rose to a team-high 86.4 percent, and he once again led the team with 14 charges drawn. His 2.41 assist-to-turnover ratio led the team and is tied for third highest all-time in K-State single-season history.

After finding such quick success, many thought that he might become an elite scorer, or an elite passer, but that is not who Spradling is. His game is not limited to excelling at one or two quantitative statistical categories, but rather doing what is asked of him game in and game out. He displays a high basketball I.Q. and is the floor general that every team needs.

"I just do whatever it takes to win, and that doesn't

mean that I have to go out and score every game," Spadling said. "There's games where I might not have put up the points and some other games where I did put up the points."

Four years ago, when K-State was starting to rise in the world of college basketball, Spradling played a huge part in the continuation of that rise to prominence. That is where he sees his legacy as a Wildcat, and that is exactly where it will reside in the future.

**"I just do whatever it takes to win, and that doesn't mean that I have to go out and score every game."**

*Will Spradling,  
Senior guard, K-State Basketball*



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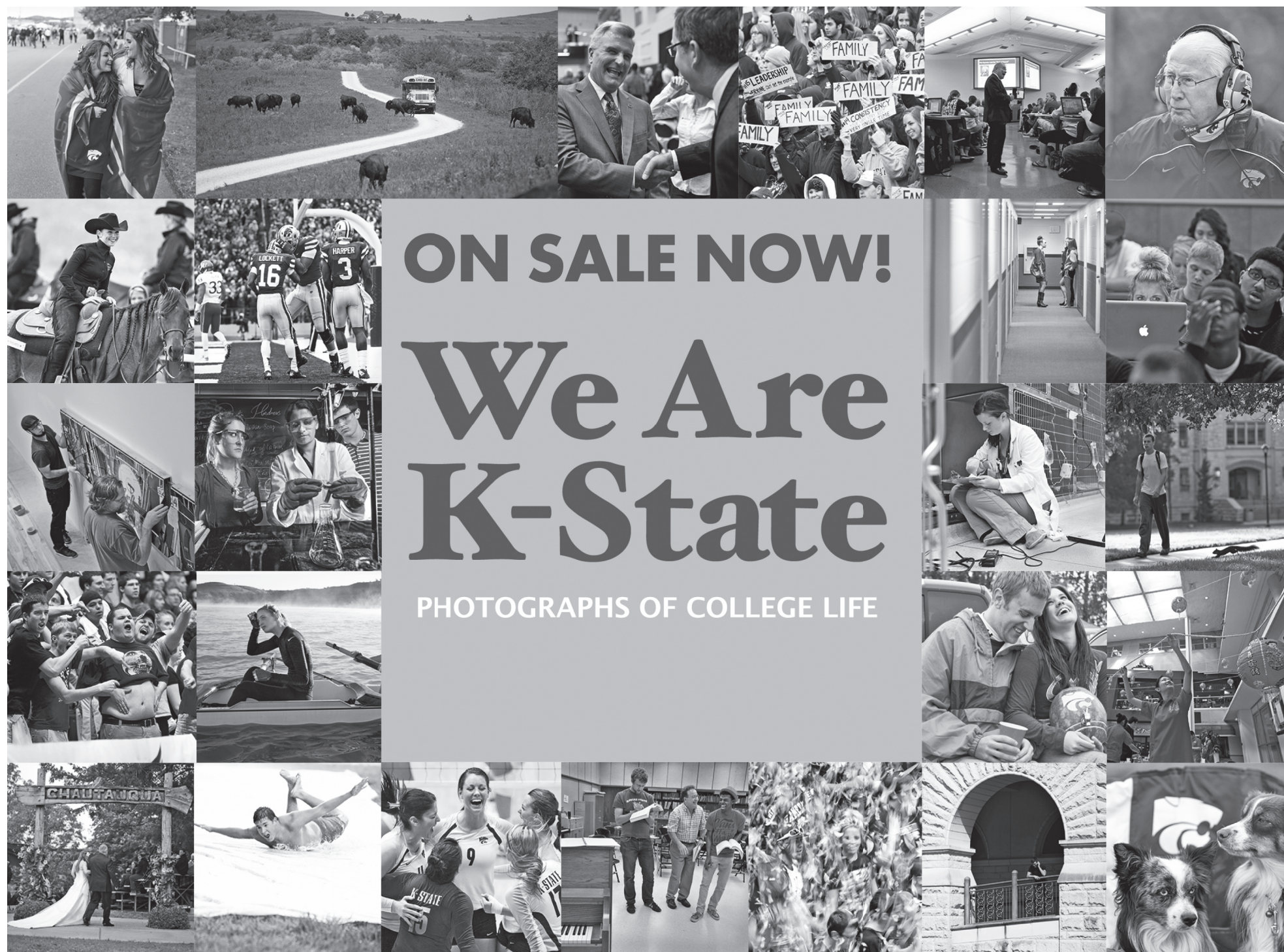


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